



## ***The Indian General Assistance Program Success Stories from Alaska***

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10, Alaska Office

October 2004

*I believe EPA's GAP program implementation in Alaska is where the greatest strides in achieving improvements in environmental protection at the community level have been made. The awareness that communities continue to develop around water/wastewater, solid waste, contaminants, and air issues, and the action that has followed for addressing those issues at the village level is staggering. It's an important program, and we need to continue to work together to find ways to provide the highest levels of support for achieving positive environmental outcomes.*

Marcia Combes, Director, Alaska Operations Office, Region 10

### **Capacity Building**

- ◆ The GAP program increases communities' ability to meet their environmental needs.

*We sent one person to a Solid Waste Workshop and they came back and fixed up our dump. Without IGAP funds our people would have been five years behind this project. With this funding we are able to find more funding, do feasibility studies in our dump, and are in the process of getting the draft-management plans approved by ADEC, and a permit to get a new landfill. Alice Julius, Goodnews Bay*

- ◆ The GAP program encourages partnership between Tribes and other entities. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are developed that may include Tribes, Municipal governments, the State of Alaska and Native corporations. These may be general, to encourage communication, or project specific (e.g., a community cleanup, using laborers hired by the Tribe and the city's equipment and operators).

Tribes have been able to build internal capacity, as well as the capacity of individual community members, by participating in or coordinating a wide variety of trainings, including:

- 40-Hour Hazardous Waste Operations
- Aboveground Storage Tank Operations
- Asbestos Abatement
- Rural Landfill Operator Certification
- Emergency Planning and Response
- Incident Command System
- Freshwater Aquatic Assessment/Monitoring

Such training enables local residents to respond to local emergencies, better manage local facilities and compete for local jobs. The GAP program also promotes strengthening administrative and financial aspects of program management. This focus has contributed to improved fiscal and administrative program management at the local level, thus enhancing the ability of Tribal Governments to properly manage programs, which, in turn, helps them obtain other funding opportunities.

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## Capacity Building *(continued)*

The program creates professional employment opportunities in economically depressed areas. The 149 Alaskan GAP grants provide year-round employment to a local environmental coordinator and often an assistant. Seasonal employment further develops the capacity of tribal members.

## Benefits to Human and Ecosystem Health

◆ Many Tribes have successfully back-hauled [removed used materials, in accordance with federal laws, from Alaskan villages to certified disposal sites] large volumes of lead acid batteries and other solid waste from their communities. This reduces the amount of lead that might enter the watershed, the food web and their children's bodies. EPA's guidelines state that there is "no safe amount of lead for human consumption."

*We were able to barge out about 70 plus junk vehicles and 3 totes of lead acid batteries in August 2003. Shirley Kriska, Nulato*

◆ Tribal Governments are taking an active role in evaluating and protecting the watersheds they reside in. Some are conducting technical assessments of the health of the waters, others are training community members as first responders for fuel spills. Several dynamic watershed groups are taking a positive role in community education and training.

*Last year we removed two fish totes, which weighed about 1,161 pounds, and this year we shipped out one fish tote, which was approximately 800 pounds. Anu Wysoki, New Koliganek*

*We are involved with the Nushagak Mulchatna Watershed, which involves networking and cooperative work with other Tribes along the Nushagak River and now the Nushagak Bay Villages. We have 8 certified HAZWOPER [hazardous waste operations] students and are working to complete our oil spill plan. Lorraine King, Ekwok*

◆ Recycling: reuse of materials such as old clothes, dishes, furniture and other household items. Plastic bags have been knitted together into reusable bags. Recycling programs have in some cases generated income for local communities.

◆ Pollution prevention/waste reduction: working with the local stores to switch from plastic to canvas bags.

◆ Spill response: emergency spill team, draft spill and hazardous materials training plans.

◆ Environmental education: environmental newsletters, working with schools to develop environmental awareness in youth.

*We have accomplished so much since we joined this program. Education for community and kids, awareness of environmental issues . . . recycling and taking care of environment (battery recycling, about 200), aluminum ship out, housing improvement through weatherization, solid-waste operator, train water technician, and involvement with watershed council. Anu Wysocki, Koliganek Village*

◆ Contracting for engineering planning services, including design class III landfill, site preparation for tank farms, and Utility Master Plans.

## Success Stories Shared by Alaskan Tribes Participating in the GAP Program

*The Tribes sent these stories to the Region 10 Alaska Tribal Office.*

### UGASHIK

*Ugashik is located on the northwest coast of the Alaskan Peninsula, 16 miles up the Ugashik River. The federally recognized Tribe is the Ugashik Traditional Council. Hattie Albecker, Ugashik Traditional Council's Environmental Coordinator provided this account of what the GAP program has accomplished.*

Before the GAP, Ugashik did not have an environmental program. Our program began in February of 2000. With the availability of the capacity-building opportunities through the GAP and the initiative of the residents of Ugashik, a much cleaner and healthier environment is enjoyed by all residents, as well as setting the ground work for our future generations.

Through the GAP, our village has been able to begin dealing with some of our solid-waste issues, such as 8000+ pounds of lead acid batteries and several buckets of household batteries back-hauled, 416 triple rinsed fuel drums back-hauled, 500+ pounds of crushed aluminum cans that have been flown out of Ugashik.

Also, a monitored collection site has been set up for recycled and reuse products, clean 55-gallon drums, scrap metals and white goods. As the opportunity arises, these items are back-hauled out of the village either by free back-haul, or the availability of different grant funds. It is very helpful to our village that now the GAP allows implementation with some of the grant funds. With the increase award that Ugashik recently received, we will be able to accomplish two more important steps toward need for the Ugashik Class III Landfill.



*Abandoned oil drums — also known as tundra blossoms.*



*On their way out of here!*



**UGASHIK** (continued)

Another major accomplishment made possible through GAP is that the villages in our region have begun to work more closely with one another. Two examples are the formation of the Ugashik Watershed Council and SECAP (Sustainable Energy Commission of the Alaska Peninsula)

The GAP has begun to help the residents of Ugashik appreciate and enjoy a cleaner and safer environment.

Hattie C. Albecker  
Environmental Coordinator  
Phone: 907-797-2331 or hattietuenv@starband.net

**The ALEUT COMMUNITY of ST. PAUL ISLAND***Fur seal*

*St. Paul Island is located 770 air miles from Anchorage, in the Bering Sea. The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island is a federally recognized Tribe of Alaskan Natives having a common bond of living together on St. Paul Island, Alaska. There are about 500 permanent residents on the island. The on-island membership of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island is approximately 425.*

*Aquilina Lestenkof and Phil Zavadil are co-directors of the Ecosystem Conservation Office. Phil Zavadil provided this background information about the Island, the Tribe and the importance of the work that they do.*

St. Paul and the other Pribilof Islands are unique in that they are the breeding grounds for over a million northern fur seals, many species of sea birds and a dwindling number of Steller sea lions, and they are surrounded by one of the world's richest fishing grounds.

Up until 20 years ago, everything about these islands and all activities were regulated and controlled by the Federal Government. Therefore, when the government pulled out and the fishing industry came in to fill the economic void, the

Tribal government was not ready or able to build a Tribal environmental program; and the impact on the water quality, the increase in noise and air pollution, and the general impact on the environment are taking their toll. Economic development needs to be balanced with monitoring of the environment to ensure its health and well-being, as well as the sustainability of the development taking place.

Aleut cultural continuity, social traditions, and the economic well-being of the community rely on customary/traditional practices. The relative significance of customary/traditional practices to individual community members ranges from economic survival to engaging in generational traditional activities of importance to social and cultural continuity.

*Fur seal  
disentanglement by the  
Stewardship Program.*



**St. Paul Island** *(continued)*

Customary/traditional practices define a direct and immediate interrelationship between the Aleut people and the natural environment, in which plant, fish, mammal, birds and other natural resources are used to sustain life and to bind the social cultural fabric of the community. The principal customary/traditional foods include: northern fur seals, Steller sea lions, hair seals, reindeer, halibut, marine invertebrates, moss berries, murre, kittiwakes, sea ducks, Least auklets, lake ducks, murre eggs, and wild celery. Due to the increased human interactions with the Pribilofs' Bering Sea environment, the need for monitoring and watching these interactions, and protecting and conserving our island ecosystem has become vital.

The Tribal Government of St. Paul has made great strides in the development and implementation of a Tribal environmental protection program. In April of 1998 the Tribal Government of St. Paul created the Ecosystem Conservation Office (ECO) to address concerns and issues such as customary/traditional uses (subsistence), water quality, air quality, land management, etc. ECO provides a place for community members to take their concerns, have them investigated and dealt with, and communicated back to them. ECO receives questions, concerns, and solutions from the community regarding a variety of issues. In addition, ECO provides a local point of contact for off island organizations with the same or similar concerns. The EPA GAP grant helped to lay this foundation.

During our first year of participating in the GAP, we started work on developing a Tribal Environmental Agreement (TEA); collecting surveys previously done by other organizations regarding environmental issues; developing a Village Environmental Planning Survey; contacting Federal and State agencies to conduct a full environmental assessment; and monitoring and assessment of environmental hazards within the community and around the island.

In our second year, we continued the work on issues identified in the FY 1999 grant, and signed TEA with EPA in September of 2000; began working on a

Specific Action Plan (SAP); and began monitoring and observing the changes occurring in the island's environment using indigenous/traditional knowledge and wisdom and western science.

In our third year we worked on the SAP and use of traditional knowledge in monitoring our island environment. We focused on addressing our community's solid and hazardous waste issues and educating our community on a variety of environmental issues.

Recently we completed our fourth year of the GAP. We continued building upon the foundation laid over the past three years by reassessing our community's environmental concerns and targeting specific issues identified by ECO and the community. We completed the Environmental Management Plan for St. Paul Island, Alaska and the final draft of our Integrated Waste Management Plan.

Now in the fifth year of the GAP program, we are continuing to focus on solid waste with the continued implementation of a recycling program, including developing a recycling management plan; finishing our Environmental Management Plan; conducting on-going observations of our island ecosystem; working with community representations to conduct pollution prevention education; and providing on-going environmental education to children and the community.

*(continued)*



*Recycling shipment.*

**St. Paul Island** (continued)

GAP has given ECO staff the skills and capacity to successfully apply for many environmental grants as well as other non-environmental grants and contracts. Some environmental grants that we have received include: Alaska Native Health Board's Alaska Solid Waste Management Demonstration Grant (3 years in a row); Tribal Open Dump Cleanup Project Grant; and Alaska Inter-Tribal Council's Integrated Waste Management Grant.

Some projects of the ECO staff are; the Rat Prevention Program; Island Sentinel Program; solid-waste planning; Recycling Program; and much more.

The Tribe describes its top three accomplishments as: 1. Establishment of a department within the Tribal Government of St. Paul to address current and on-going environmental issues in our community and on our island. 2. Signing our Tribal Environmental Agreement with EPA in October 2000. 3. Establishment and implementation of the St. Paul Island Recycle Program.

Phillip A. Zavadil  
Co-director, Ecosystem Conservation Office  
Phone: 907-546-3200 or pazavadil@tdxak.com

**NATIVE VILLAGE of GOODNEWS BAY**

*The community is located on the north shore of Goodnews Bay at the mouth of Goodnews River. It is 116 air miles south of Bethel, 110 miles northwest of Dillingham and 400 miles west of Anchorage. The federally recognized Tribe in the community is the Native Village of Goodnews Bay, where 93.9% of the population is Alaska Native. Goodnews is a traditional Yup'ik Eskimo village, practicing a subsistence, trapping and fishing lifestyle.*

*Alice Julius, the Native village of Goodnews Bay's Environmental Director, sent this information about what the GAP program has done for their community.*

The GAP program has provided our community with a lot of environmental education, awareness, grants, and jobs. It has addressed our solid waste issues, provided us with an EPA open dump cleanup grant.

*Goodnews Bay dump, before.*



Last spring we shipped out lead acid batteries. A total of 54 batteries were collected, and we are still collecting, and we have a separate collection site at the dump. We back-haul by barge to NAPA Auto Parts in Bethel. We are still planning to back-haul, but we have some problems with getting battery totes because we don't have the money to purchase totes at the moment.



*Goodnews Bay dump, after.*

**Goodnews Bay** (continued)

We also have been collecting cans through the VISTA Volunteer and the Goodnews Bay Youth Group. I also printed out an educational pamphlet based on our community and our children and passed it on to each household in our community. This was printed in the UPS store in Bethel. I even was asked to do another one.

We have two River Educators, since last year, who ride the river three times a week, giving out

and educating the river users with, brochures that we had drafted and council had approved. They do litter prevention in our river. They also work closely with the Togiak National Wildlife Refuges and are invited to the monthly meetings with our Tribe. The GAP program has been helpful in closing our dump. These are some before and after pictures of the dump.

Alice Julius  
Environmental Director,  
Phone: 907-967-8034 or [aju1904748@aol.com](mailto:aju1904748@aol.com)

**NEW KOLIGANEK**

*Koliganek is located on the left bank of the Nushagak River, and lies 65 miles northeast of Dillingham. Average summer temperatures range from 37 to 66; winter temperatures range from 4 to 30. It is a Yup'ik Eskimo village with Russian Orthodox practices. Since first listed in the 1880 census, the village has moved four miles downstream from the original site. A federally recognized tribe is located in the community: the New Koliganek Village Council. Some 87% of the population is Alaska Native. Subsistence activities are an important part of the lifestyle.*

*Anu Wysocki, Koliganek's Environmental Director, has this to say about what the GAP program has done in their community.*

The GAP program has benefitted my village in many ways. Our village is cleaner and more educated on environmental issues. We have addressed our solid waste issues. We have applied for the Solid Waste Grant for 3 years and have received it for 3 consecutive years. We have hired a solid waste operator and started trash separation, recycling aluminum cans and batteries, cleaning up the village. We have a burn box and a waste oil heater.

We removed hazardous waste like batteries. Last year, we removed about 3 totes of batteries and are continuing to do so. We back-haul batteries by barge and back-haul cans by air. (Many Tribes participate in Alaskans for Litter Prevention And Recycling (ALPAR) a program that creates opportunities for back-haul of clean aluminum cans by local airlines. This program is widely known as Flying Cans.) We will back-haul this spring

aluminum cans, and in the fall, large aluminum stuff. We will use a barge to back-haul batteries.

We get too much junk mail for box holders. They always end up in the dump. I tried to get them to send less but they say they send one for each household even I tell them not everyone uses them only half. It would help if they sent only half of what they send. This is a monthly thing and is a big nuisance.

Koliganek has operated a piped system for over 25 years. Water is derived from a well and is treated. Thirty-three homes and facilities are connected to the piped water and a community septic tank. Eight homes have individual wells and septic systems. Fifteen homes haul water and [sewage] honeybuckets. There is one school located in the community, attended by 79 students.

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**New Koliganek** *(continued)*

Koliganek is classified as an isolated village and emergency service is provided by a health aide.

A new state-owned 3,000-foot long by 75-foot wide runway is available. Boats and ATVs

are used in the summer, snow machines in the winter. Locals travel to New Stuyahok frequently. There are no docking facilities; goods are lightered [sent by barge] from Dillingham.

Anu Wysocki  
Environmental Coordinator  
Phone: 907-596-3314 or anuwys@gci.net

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**NATIVE VILLAGE OF EKWOK**

*Ekwok is located along the Nushagak River, 43 miles northeast of Dillingham and 285 miles southwest of Anchorage. Ekwok is a Yup'ik Eskimo village with a fishing and subsistence lifestyle.*

*Submitted by Loraine King, Environmental Planner*

The GAP Program has and continues to benefit our community by providing us the opportunity to build our Tribal capacity to effectively manage and develop an environmental program in our community. For one we were able to provide employment for two community members, and cut back on unemployment. The staff and a council member were able to obtain training and needed skills to learn about different aspect of the GAP grant, like requirements, laws, regulations, as well as learning about many other programs we can tap into for funding implementation projects.

The staff was able to receive other high-tech training, such as computer programs that we've never really used before. Through educating the community, the members became more aware of environmental issues and concerns. We are able to issue a newsletter and provide youth activities to the students, as well as hold community meetings. We were able to start a recycling center, through the ANHB grant and pass a resolution for non-smoking in and near public buildings, through the Clean Indoor Air Demonstration Grant.

We have also signed off on a Tribal Environmental Agreement with Region 10 and look forward to negotiations on projects when we come to that stage. We have also revised our Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Ekwok to include Ekwok Native Limited and are starting to hold joint meetings to work on issues together. We have developed working relationships with federal and state agencies, as well as other surrounding communities. We are involved with the Nushagak Mulchatna Watershed,



*Cans collected by the recycling program.*

which involves networking and cooperative working with other Tribes along the Nushagak River and now the Nushagak Bay Villages. We have eight certified hazwoper students, and are working to complete our generic oil-spill plan.

We have addressed some solid and hazardous waste issues with the GAP grant. The solid-waste



## Native Village of Ekwok *(continued)*

issues are: recycling aluminum cans, news-papers, cardboard boxes, Styrofoam, Education of the students and community on solid waste (littering, effort of recycling, and landfill issues). We also have purchased a chipper/shredder through the ANHB grant and the community has shredded the brush that were cut, some community members used them as chips to light their steam bath, and for flower gardens and plants.

The hazardous-waste issues are: recycling of batteries of all sizes and shapes, and providing information on hazardous waste through our newsletter, as well as community presentations. We are looking at starting a household hazardous waste collection soon. We started some used-oil collection. We have back hauled many pounds of batteries. The batteries that we shipped out were back-hauled with Yutana Barge Services from

Ekwok to Dillingham and with Northland Services from Dillingham to Anchorage. Northland charged us a total of \$201.40 for our first shipment of two fish totes.

We would like to know who takes recycled paper, newspaper, or just paper in general. We need ideas on the big coffee cans that are not aluminum and can't be recycled. We have a few ideas for usage, but often times the school produces a lot and we would like to know of other ways to recycle them besides crushing and throwing the unused cans in the landfill. We are now using them for plants, dog plates, used oil containers, and freezing salmon. Our previous Solid Waste Manager was looking into creating toys for the children.

Lorraine King  
Environmental Planner  
Phone: 907-464-3300, king2lorraine@yahoo.com

## NATIVE VILLAGE OF EAGLE

*Eagle village is on the southern bank of the Yukon River, three miles east of the City of Eagle, on the Taylor Highway. Eagle is a Han Athabascan Indian village. The federally recognized Tribe in the community is the Native Village of Eagle.*

*Submitted by Barry Westphal, Environmental Planner*

Education about environmental issues is the starting place. Getting this information out to the community and in the school to our children is vital to making changes in our community. We need to be able to obtain training on environmental projects that will enhance capacity building within the village. Raising awareness of environmental issues will have to come from within, or our old habits will not change. After education and capacity building, our main concerns are solid waste, hazardous waste, recycling, water quality, air quality and subsistence issues.

We started with GAP three years ago. We began with developing an environmental plan that identified environmental issues within our community and laid a foundation of where we were at that time. The plan is to be an on-going plan that will change as we develop. It will be updated periodically and act as a form of direction for our program to develop. The GAP program has produced the funds and guidance necessary for our village to have an environmental program. The program is

raising awareness of environmental issues and concerns in our community and is enabling us to present information and answers that in turn make changes in the community. Because of GAP, our capacity to deal with environmental issues has begun and will grow.

After developing the foundational environmental plan, we have been able to start several different projects. There have been seven environmental presentations done in our school that included two

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## Native Village of Eagle *(continued)*

field trips that gave the upper grades (6-12) an introduction to rapid bio-assessment methods. Other topics included groundwater and recycling. We also had an art contest to raise awareness of environmental issues. The students used environmental themes to decorate canvas bags and then distributed them in the community. We include an environmental page each month in the village newsletter. We have developed special projects within the village (such as home assessments) in order to get people more directly involved with environmental issues. Our recycling efforts have been improved by the increased storage capacity at the landfill. We are working on a water quality assessment program, an oil-spill response plan and a Tribal Environmental Agreement.

Our recycling program works due to two sources. The first is a large village truck that goes to Anchorage when it has need. At that time, all collected aluminum cans are taken in. A large plastic container full of car batteries is also taken. Second, recycling doesn't work without the efforts of the community and the volunteers who make it happen. At times, individuals volunteer to take items, such as old appliances, out to



*Ethel Beck cleaning a catch of King Salmon on the Yukon River beach below Eagle Village.*

a recycling center when they go to town. Our road is only open six months a year, so items have to be stored until they can be moved. We hope to be able to expand to other items such as cardboard and plastics.

Barry Westphal, Environmental Planner  
Phone: 907-547-2281 or bweagle@aptalaska.net

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## GWICH'YAA ZHEE (FORT YUKON) TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

*Fort Yukon is located on the Arctic Circle, at the confluence of the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers, 145 air miles northeast of Fairbanks. About 88.7% of the population is Alaska Native. The Native Village of Fort Yukon is a federally recognized Tribe. Winters are long and harsh, with extended periods of sub-zero weather.*

*2003 GAP Program accomplishments are submitted by Vickie Thomas, Environmental Manager.*

Fort Yukon is participating in the household hazardous waste back-haul with Yutana barge lines. The barge comes up during the spring and fall months only. Our environmental program has successfully back-hauled 93 lead acid batteries, 63 drums of waste oil, 8 old vehicles and 318 pounds of aluminum cans out of Fort Yukon, Alaska in 2003. We are hoping to increase the amount of aluminum cans that are being back-hauled and recycled in Fairbanks. We recently sent another shipment out.

We plan and coordinate annually the volunteer, community-wide spring and fall cleanups. Volunteers that pick up garbage along the roadways are given yellow ALPAR bags. We receive small grants from local organizations to purchase prizes, plastic bags, gift certificates and food for a cookout. We also ask airlines to provide round-trip tickets, which are raffled off to raise funds for money for pay-outs to students. We always try to have a cook

out afterwards to award all volunteers for helping to clean up and beautify our community.

Every year during our spring cleanup we purchase flower starters, lawn seeds, can crushers, vegetable and flower seeds, gardening tools, etc., to use for prizes for a drawing. We usually have prizes for the cleanest yard, most-improved yards, for the best landscaping. Having the prizes and give-aways during this time increases participation.

**Gwich'Yaa Zhee - Fort Yukon** *(continued)*

We received a grant through the Alaska Native Health Board a few years back to purchase a used oil burner. During our "Fall Cleanup," we were cleaning around the community and got the businesses involved. The local government and power plant found a lot in their storage areas. We shipped it all out on the barge. We have a small amount in storage for the waste-oil burner to burn during the winter months. Plus, we are receiving used oil from the community members. This is working out well. We are also educating the community about the danger of contaminating our groundwater.

I have a volunteer environmental committee set up to discuss environmental issues and concerns that we receive from community members. After discussing the problems, we make recommendations to the tribal council. I also have a complaint form that is available for people to fill out. Complaints are given to the committee for discussion.

**Recycling**

We are leasing the Tribal government's garage with EPA's monies, and it is being used as the recycling center. All recyclables are dropped off or picked up by our department (depending on availability of a vehicle). There is an area outside of our building for drop-off of lead-acid batteries. Everyone now knows where to take the batteries, and this is working out. Some items we collect are: aluminum cans, aluminum tabs, lead-acid batteries (including the small ones) ink cartridges, cardboard boxes, newspapers, paper bags, styrofoam, (including small peanuts), used tires, plastic grocery bags, etc. We are teaching community members how to reuse other items.

In July, the local government passed an ordinance banning the use of plastic grocery bags in the stores. Instead, customers are asked to use canvas bags or purchase paper ones. It was hard at first, because a lot of people did not want to change their shopping habits. But after educating everyone on the solid-waste problem plastic brings to our community, they are adjusting. We no longer see white plastic garbage bags blowing everywhere or getting stuck in the trees. I see a lot of community

members using the canvas bags that were purchased by the environmental department. I am trying to convince the local stores to sell their own canvas bags. Also, the local store is using all the cardboard boxes they have for customer purchases. Before, it was all taken to the landfill and burned.

Another big project we are doing is the "used clothing, appliance exchange program." We are collecting clothing, working appliances, shoes, jackets, toys and other items still usable. We set up this program because we did not like to see usable items in our landfill. The community really likes



*Boat on the Yukon River.*

this, and we are seeing more participation now that the people are aware of what we are doing. They are even looking for me to open the doors on weekends. I have a few community members, including my own mother, that volunteer to separate and fold the clothes, pair the shoes, hang up shirts, etc.

**Other Projects**

Our department still needs to redo the environmental survey. We completed one in 1998, so we need to see if the priorities have changes.

Another project we are facing is the possibility of closing an old dump site. The local city government has about \$25,000 to use towards cleaning up and closing this old dump area. We are currently seeking more funds. The first thing we have to do is fence in the whole area. This will take most of the money.

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## Gwich'Yaa Zhee — Fort Yukon (continued)

We are working with a trainer who has contracted with the Yutana barge lines. He will be conducting a Hazmat or Hazwhopper training. By next summer we will be ready to start the project. Currently, there is nobody trained to handle the hazardous materials; no refresher courses have been done.

Our current landfill has been cleaned up a little and a drop-off area has been established for community members. There is an area for wood materials and batteries. We are now working on establishing areas for aluminum cans, as well as household hazardous waste. We just constructed a burn box and are now deciding on when to burn and what not to burn. We decided to focus on getting the whole area fenced in, then plan to establish certain times during the week when people could drop off their garbage. We need to have one person monitoring the area during the day to ensure that only burnable materials are placed in the burn box.



*Tribal Watershed Council Training in Ft. Yukon.*

The Tribal Council has selected a location for our future landfill, but we will be working on closing out the two that we have open before even thinking about a new one. The environmental committee will be working on plans for the future site. We are still working on establishing a solid-waste management plan for our area.

Vickie Thomas  
Environmental Manager  
Phone: 907-662-2581 or vickiethomas99@hotmail.com

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## THE YUKON RIVER INTER-TRIBAL WATERSHED COUNCIL (YRITWC)

*The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC) is an international organization with non-profit status in the U.S. and societal status in Canada. The organization is comprised of over 44 First Nation and Tribal Governments spanning the entire Yukon River watershed and providing outreach to over 60 communities. The Yukon River Watershed—one of the largest, most remote, intact ecosystems in the world—is in peril from non-point source pollution, mining disturbances, toxic military waste, oil spills, municipal solid waste, global climate change, and declining health of the boreal forests.*

*Submitted by Rob Rosenfield, Alaska Region Director, YRITWC*

The Watershed Council grew out of a grass-roots effort to clean up communities, promote environmental education and protect the future and health of the Yukon River by encouraging and assisting communities in changing their habits that negatively impact the international watershed. In 1997, Tribal leaders came together in a government-to-government manner, united by the desire to protect the watershed. Their joint commitment

was articulated and solidified in the form of a unique Inter-Tribal Accord, an internal agreement between sovereign indigenous nations to communicate and cooperate whenever possible in cleaning up the Yukon River. The Accord has proven to be the most sustainable component of long-term stewardship and sets an example for other watersheds across the globe. The Watershed Council is

## Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council

the direct result of the Accord signed by the Chiefs and representatives from the Tlingit, Gwich'in and Koyukon Athabascan, and Yup'ik Nations.

**YRITWC** has grown in size and impact:

In December 1997, Thirty-four Tribes and First Nations gathered in Galena, Alaska, and developed, by consensus, a mission statement. These guiding principles set by the founders of the YRITWC were designed to emulate the values of an Elder, thus encouraging a non-judgmental, non-polarizing, and inclusive approach to solving complex environmental problems and promoting meaningful collaboration.

### YRITWC Mission Statement

*We, the First Nations/Indigenous Tribes from the headwaters to the mouth of the Yukon River, having been placed here by our Creator, do hereby agree to initiate and continue the cleanup and preservation of the Yukon River for the protection of our own and future generations of our Tribes/First Nations and for the continuation of our traditional Native way of life.*



*Watershed Council meeting at Ft. Yukon, Alaska.*

In May 1999, Tribes and First Nations gathered in Mountain Village, Alaska, and agreed by consensus to the guiding principles of the organization, the 50-year vision, eight objectives, five goals for each community to work on, and the commitment to develop an Inter-Tribal Accord.

In August 2001, Thirty-five Tribes and First Nations, with more than 150 participants came

together in Teslin, Yukon Territory, for the third summit; 33 Tribes and First Nations signed the Inter-Tribal Accord.

In August 2002, YRITWC presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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**Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council***(continued)*

In October 2002, YRITWC received the Pollution Prevention Award from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

In January 2003, the organization completed a unified watershed assessment summarizing the major contaminant sources in the Yukon River.

In August 2003, over thirty-eight Tribes and First Nations came together for the 4th summit in Fort Yukon, Alaska; nine more Tribes and First Nations signed the Inter-Tribal Accord; resolutions passed expanding the organization's mandate to assist in the empowerment of tribes in the area of co-management of all natural resources; in addition, the Watershed Council received a seat on the oversight committee overseeing the building of a sewage treatment facility in Dawson City, Yukon Territory.

The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council's greatest success has been in raising community consciousness resulting in grassroots community cooperation, increased responsibility, and community-driven natural resource management. The above has been accomplished within a spiritual and cultural foundation in one of the largest watersheds in the world. We consider improved stewardship practices in modern times to be the single most important achievement of the Tribal Governments along the international watershed, which spans 330,000 square miles.

The YRITWC has been instrumental in achieving:

- The establishment of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation forest and watershed protection area at the headwaters of the Yukon River in the upper lakes region;
- A ruling by the Yukon Territory Water Board in favor of building a new sewage-treatment facility for Dawson City by 2003;

- Resolutions in seventeen Gwich'in and several other communities to ban Styrofoam, improve landfills, create recycling programs, and eliminate plastic bag usage.

- The birth of more than 25 Tribal environmental programs in Alaska on the Yukon River; tremendous progress in the area of military toxic waste clean-ups in Galena, Ft. Yukon, and Tanana;

YRITWC has facilitated the birth of Tribal environmental programs by providing a multitude of training opportunities for the assistance of Tribal Environmental Programs. The trainings have included: Developing TEAs, Writing QAPP's, Environmental Education, RCRA, Grants Management and Grants Writing, Water Quality Monitoring and Sampling, Strategic Planning, Report Writing, and Emergency Response Training.

YRITWC-provided training and the GAP grants are among the most important factors that have helped Tribal governments develop the capacity to go from just four Tribal environment programs in 1997 when YRITWC was established to more than 25 today.

Some examples of the types of programs developed by Tribal governments within the Yukon River Watershed include:

- In Galena, Alaska, the Loudon Tribal Government created a for-profit environmental cleanup corporation in order to oversee and facilitate the remediation of contaminants at the Galena Air Force Station.
- In Ft. Yukon, Alaska, the Gwichyaa Gwich'in Tribal Government is in the final stages of completing a tertiary wastewater treatment facility.



**Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council** (continued)

- In Tanana, Alaska, the Tanana Tribal Government took the lead role in overseeing and completing a contaminated soil remediation initiative spanning more than 200 square yards.
- More than twenty communities have established battery collection sites and backhaul programs, resulting in the removal of several tons of batteries from the Yukon River and its landfills.
- More than twenty communities have initiated recycling programs that have shipped tens of thousands of aluminum cans to recycling centers. In Galena, Alaska, the Loudon Tribal Government established the first transfer site in rural Alaska, increasing the life of its landfill by ten years, with a waste compactor, recycling program, site separation, and waste oil recovery.
- The Tribal Governments of Arctic Village, Venetie, and Tanana have all established renewable energy programs with the use of solar and wind power.
- More than twenty communities have effectively implemented culturally relevant and hands-on environmental education into their school systems. The Minto and Koyukuk Tribal Governments are in the process of completing community-based emergency response plans.
- The Tribe in St. Mary's, Alaska, has assumed a lead role in providing a series of trainings and capacity-building workshops for the nineteen Yupik Tribal Governments improving stewardship among these lower Yukon River communities. Several Tribal Governments have taken a lead role in assessing and monitoring water quality.
- The Huslia and Stevens Village Tribal Governments have effectively established co-management agreements with federal entities.

Rob Rosenfield  
Alaska Region Director, YRITWC  
Phone: 907-451-2530 or yritwc@alaskalife.net



*Each Native village brings water to be combined with others at a Water Ceremony, during a Watershed Council meeting in Ft. Yukon.*

## BACK-HAULED SOLID AND HAZARDOUS WASTE IN ALASKA

The table below reflects the total volume of back-hauled materials from the communities in this report.

TRIBE	BATTERIES (lbs)	CANS (lbs)	CARDBOARD (lbs)	OTHER MATERIALS
Ugashik	8,000	550		416 triple rinsed fuel drums
St. Paul Island	12,679	13,617	26,140	40 lbs. of #112 plastic
Goodnews Bay	5,400			
New Koliganek	1,951			
Ekwok	4,524	2,000		200 gal. antifreeze
Native Village of Eagle	1,000 per year	800-1000 per year		appliances
Native Village of Ft. Yukon	4,416 (est. based on report 96 batteries, av. wt. 46 lbs.)	318		63 drums of waste oil & 8 old vehicles
Total	33,554	17,335	26,140	NA
Tons	16.77	8.67	13.07	NA